

Disingenuous Gene

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 26 Jul 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4675>

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b sharp — 26 Jul 2006, 17:13

My bad on initial subject misspelling. Actually I feel priggish and petty for pursuing this thread futher but...well..maybe it is useful.

Dan'l quotes from Castle of the Otter:

Wolfe states plainly: A thing's name states what it is. I guess that's my bottom line; he makes a >firm rule like this, puts it in print, and then ignores it _only_ for naming worlds?

I think it requires interpretation and no, the exception is not only for naming worlds/universes. I've already noted how Wolfe makes little attempt to match a BotNS characters' saintly name to the namesake Catholic saint. He doesn't choose any old saint name though, only archaic names. This says to me, if he is following his onomastic rule, that the names denote this population as an ancient group of humans with a special relationship to a Jesus-like character. A world where names like Robert and Marie and Kim Lee Soong don't fit.

Let's take monsters; Wolfe says that in BotNS he gave monsters monster names. So, take Typhon, the hundred headed, fire belching Greek monster, son of Gaia and Tartaros, nephew of Erebus, brother/husband of Echidna. Is that Typhon our Typhon? Or were the names Typhon, Erebus and Echidna picked from mythology as a nice match?

I don't know if Briah and Yesod were meant to be parallel or in series but I like whichever fits the broader pattern of the text. Kaballah says parallel, the text (to me) says series but perhaps this is not a crucial question.

It is this part of Dan'l's post which really perturbs me:

More than anything else, I think it's a matter of not wanting to give the game away -- he has >repeatedly claimed that everything we need to know is there, and he doesn't want to tell the >answers. I think he sometimes takes this to frustrating levels: no, I don't believe he ever actually _lies_, but I believe he sometimes responds in ways that ...how shall I put it? ... use the >truth in misleading ways.

I can understand Wolfe not wanting to give answers away but why would he deliberately mislead readers to a false answer? Perhaps you are suggesting it isn't intentional? That he is so vigilant on avoiding disclosure that he accidentally goes too far the other way?

This next Lawrence Person interview clip offers contrary evidence (and is germane to Ori's post I think):

When asked how he fit into the "New Wave" of SF writers, Wolfe responded:

GW: Of course, I did do the rather tricky thing, which I suppose is New Wave, of having one of >the characters in one of the other stories as the purported author of, a, aggh...I'm sorry, I've lost >the titles of my own

stories.

LP: "'A Story,' by John V. Marsch."

GW: "'A Story,' by John V. Marsch," yes, which is not actually written by John V. Marsch, but by >the shadowchild who has replaced John V. Marsch.
(laughs) That's New Wave.

This seems a very candid revelation on an ambiguous text issue. If he misleading us about the shadowchild replacement all I can ask is.... Why? So those who aren't sure will guess wrong? So those who guess correctly will doubt themselves? I just don't get it.

- bsharp

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 26 Jul 2006, 18:20 · in reply to b sharp

Dan'l quotes from Castle of the Otter:

Wolfe states plainly: A thing's name states what it is. I guess that's my bottom line; he makes a >firm rule like this, puts it in print, and then ignores it _only_ for naming worlds?

I think it requires interpretation

Agreed.

and no, the exception is not only for naming worlds/universes. I've already noted how Wolfe makes little attempt to match a BotNS characters' saintly name to the namesake Catholic saint.

I suspect that he _does_ but that we haven't worked out the relationships yet. I'm certainly not familiar enough with the ancient saints to do this.

He doesn't choose any old saint name though, only archaic names. This says to me, if he is following his onomastic rule, that the names denote this population as an ancient group of humans with a special relationship to a Jesus-like character. A world where names like Robert and Marie and Kim Lee Soong don't fit.

Well, yes, but also because he is deliberately choosing names that will be _unfamiliar_ to us, just as he deliberately uses perfectly good but unfamiliar English words to create a sense of alienness (a technique used rather differently by Stephen Donaldson in his "Covenant" books).

Let's take monsters; Wolfe says that in BotNS he gave monsters monster names. So, take Typhon, the hundred headed, fire belching Greek monster, son of Gaia and Tartaros, nephew of Erebus, brother/husband of Echidna. Is that Typhon our Typhon?

No; but he's certainly go thte extra head, and is certainly a monster and the father of monsters. I suspect that an argument could be made for "fire belching" also being symbolically significant.

Brother/husband of Echidna? Well, husband certainly, and sibs in that they share the same electronic womb on the _Whorl_.

Which creates an interesting question regarding his other relations, doesn't it?

Or were the names Typhon, Erebus and Echidna picked from mythology as a nice match?

A nice match, yes, but a symbolically significant one as well. In other words, it says more about "what the thing is" than simply "it's a monster."

And by that logic, "Briah" and "Yesod" say more than "these are universes" (or sephiroth or whatever).

It is this part of Dan'l's post which really perturbs me:

More than anything else, I think it's a matter of not wanting to give the game away -- he has repeatedly claimed that everything we need to know is there, and he doesn't want to tell the answers. I think he sometimes takes this to frustrating levels: no, I don't believe he ever actually _lies_, but I believe he sometimes responds in ways that ...how shall I put it? ... use the truth in misleading ways.

I can understand Wolfe not wanting to give answers away but why would he deliberately mislead readers to a false answer? Perhaps you are suggesting it isn't intentional? That he is so vigilant on avoiding disclosure that he accidentally goes too far the other way?

That is exactly what I am suggesting. As I said, he does not deliberately lie. To deliberately mislead with the truth is a kind of lie, unless of course you're a Jesuit; but to tell a partial truth in hope of leaving something ambiguous can have unintended consequences. I suggest that is what is going on, nothing more.

Thus when you quote:

GW: "'A Story,' by John V. Marsch," yes, which is not actually written by John V. Marsch, but by >the shadowchild who has replaced John V. Marsch. (laughs) That's New Wave.

I agree that:

This seems a very candid revelation on an ambiguous text issue.

I don't believe there is any deliberate misleading going on here. It is barely possible that, speaking in a casual and relaxed format (as he clearly is here) he may have slipped (as indeed he couldn't remember the title of the story, other details may have slipped his mind), but a serious substantial argument would have to be made to convince me.

Besides, it makes more thematic sense for the shadowchildren to be real; one of the many things 5HC is about, after all, is colonialism and postcolonialism.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson